

Hart–Rudman Commission says that the US homeland is likely to be attacked with weapons of mass destruction sometime in the next 25 years.

New World COMING

By Peter Grier

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AMERICA is the strongest military power the world has ever seen—by far. Yet its strength is a ponderous shield, and, over the next 25 years, the US will become increasingly vulnerable to hostile attack on its homeland.

Rogue states, terrorists, and other adversaries will acquire weapons of mass destruction, and some will use them. The advanced technologies which make the US military and economy the envy of the world will themselves create new vulnerabilities.

So asserts a sweeping new Pentagon–ordered study of the nation’s national security situation. “Americans will likely die on American soil, possibly in large numbers,” concludes “New World Coming,” the first report of the US Commission on National Security/21st Century. The panel also is known as the Hart–Rudman Commission, for its two co-chairmen, former United States Sens. Gary Hart (D–Colo.) and Warren B. Rudman (R–N.H.).

Meanwhile, the pressures of the fast-paced global economy and rising world expectations for freedom and development could crack apart unstable countries. In some cases, disintegrating nations may drag whole regions down with them. That means Kosovo–style fights could crowd the US foreign policy agenda in the decades ahead.

The US, along with its allies and international organizations, needs to start planning now to survive and prosper in this future of asymmetrical military threats and regional instabilities.

“Developing effective ways to cope with these crises ... will require a far more systematic effort than has been made so far,” Hart said at a House Armed Services Committee hearing on Oct. 5.

Many Americans believe that the end of the Cold War left this nation more secure

and the world, in general, a safer place. To paraphrase Rep. Floyd Spence (R-S.C.), chairman of the committee, reality does not support this view. If the US military is to shape itself to deal with the problems of the next millennium, he said, it must have some idea about what those problems will be.

That is the idea behind the Hart-Rudman Commission, a federal advisory panel formed in 1998 and mandated by Congress to issue a series of studies over the next year and a half.

Forward to the Past

The situation today is similar to that of the late 1940s, say commission members. By this, they mean the current national security infrastructure was designed for one kind of world but now confronts the dawning of another, which will be quite different.

Back then, a series of studies and surveys led to the National Security Act of 1947, which among other things established the Air Force as an independent service. The current commission hopes to have a comparable impact.

Established by Congress, the panel will serve, in essence, as Red Team critics from outside the Department of Defense. Its 14 members include former Secretary of Defense James Schlesinger; former Secretary of the Air Force Donald Rice; retired Army Gen. John Galvin, former Supreme Allied Commander Europe; Norman Augustine, the former chairman and chief executive officer of Lockheed Martin; Newt Gingrich (R-Ga.), former Speaker of the House; Andrew Young, former US ambassador to the United Nations; and Leslie Gelb, former State Department official and now the president of the Council on Foreign Relations. Serving in the panel's top staff position as executive director is Gen. Charles G. Boyd, USAF (Ret.), former deputy commander in chief of US European Command.

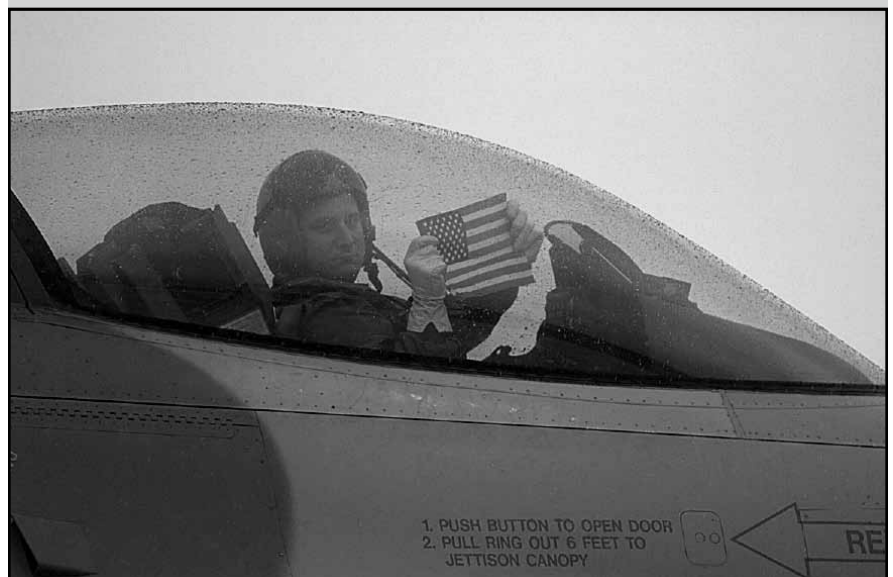
The organization of the US national security structure changed little over the last 50 years, commissioners note. But threats will be different in 2025—so defense needs to change, too.

The commission's Phase 1 report, released Sept. 15, describes the emerging world of the next 25 years. Phase 2, due next April, will lay out a national

The New World, Briefly Noted

The Hart-Rudman Commission reached 14 basic conclusions about the world of the next 25 years. Here they are:

1. America will become increasingly vulnerable to hostile attack on our homeland, and our military superiority will not entirely protect us.
2. Rapid advances in information and biotechnologies will create new vulnerabilities for US security.
3. New technologies will divide the world as well as draw it together.
4. The national security of all advanced states will be increasingly affected by the vulnerabilities of the evolving global economic infrastructure.
5. Energy will continue to have major strategic significance.
6. All borders will be more porous; some will bend and some will break.
7. The sovereignty of states will come under pressure but will endure.
8. Fragmentation or failure of states will occur, with destabilizing effects on neighboring states.
9. Foreign crises will be replete with atrocities and the deliberate terrorizing of civilian populations.
10. Space will become a critical and competitive military environment.
11. The essence of war will not change.
12. US intelligence will face more challenging adversaries, and even excellent intelligence will not prevent all surprises.
13. The United States will be called upon frequently to intervene militarily in a time of uncertain alliances and with the prospect of fewer forward-deployed forces.
14. The emerging security environment in the next quarter century will require different military and other national capabilities.



USAF photo by S/A. Jeffrey Allen

security strategy appropriate to that world. Phase 3, in 2001, will propose changes to the nation's security infrastructure in an attempt to implement that strategy.

"It will be the task of this commission to probably recommend some things that will be highly controversial, knowing how each constituency of our defense establishment feels about itself," Rudman told reporters at a Sept. 15 press conference.

First, the good news: The world of 2025 could see much less conflict than today, according to Hart-Rudman's Phase 1 report. Tens of millions of the poor may rise to middle-class lives free from the depredations of want and disease. An explosion in scientific discovery "bears the potential of near miraculous benefit for humanity."

Regions Aflame

However, progress is a fragile process. Nothing is guaranteed. Dire scenarios of regions aflame, in the grip of despots, are also possible. And active American engagement in the world may be a necessary condition to fully realize the promise of the next century.

"It is a rare moment and a special opportunity in history when the acknowledged dominant global power seeks neither territory nor political empire," says the commission. "Every effort must be made to ensure that this responsibility is discharged wisely."

That is perhaps the most basic assumption underlying the Hart-Rudman study: That the US will remain a primary political, military, and cultural force through 2025. In fact, "the United States will remain the principal military power in the world," says the study.

That does not mean that the United States will be the world's only guarantor of stability. Washington will still work with and within a variety of international organizations, the commissioners believe. Nongovernmental organizations such as refugee aid groups, ethnic lobbies, environmentalists, and others will continue to proliferate and are likely to be more important in the years ahead.

As the US confronts an array of increasingly complex threats, it will be dependent on allies, although in the next century "it will find reliable

alliances more difficult to establish and sustain," according to the Hart-Rudman group.

The panel also concludes that the much-heralded globalization revolution will continue, with the international aspects of finance, information services, transportation, and other economic sectors increasing.

While fossil fuels will remain the dominant energy source, science and technology will produce amazing advances that will be distributed ever more widely around the world. The benefits of the rising economic tide will remain unevenly distributed, however. "Disparities in income will increase and widespread poverty will persist," says the commission.

Nirvana is not coming. Weapons of mass destruction will proliferate to both states and nonstate actors, such as terrorists. So will weapons of mass disruption, such as computer viruses.

"Maintenance of a robust nuclear deterrent therefore remains essential as well as investment in new forms of defense against these threats," says the Hart-Rudman group.

Deterrence does not always suffice. In many nations, the importance of human life is viewed differently than it is viewed in the United States. "We should expect conflicts in which adversaries, because of cultural affinities different from our own, will resort to forms and levels of violence shocking to our sensibilities," says the group.

Given its analysis of the strategic background of 2025, the US Commission on National Security/21st Century foresees some daunting vulnerabilities for the nation.

Battleground: America

Most sobering is that the US could become what the Middle East, the Balkans, Central Asia, and East Africa are today: a battleground.

"America will become increasingly vulnerable to hostile attack on our homeland, and our military superiority will not entirely protect us," reads the first of the report's main conclusions.

Though the US will be stronger than any other single nation, emerging powers—either alone or with allies—will more and more be able to blunt US

regional aims, conclude commissioners. Unable to totally enforce its will abroad, the US will find its traditional defenses too inflexible for some 21st century threats. American influence and culture will be both pervasive and pervasively resented.

Not only will the disgruntled of the world obtain nuclear, biological, or chemical weapons. "Some will use them," says the report, with dire consequences for the US.

And the US will be uniquely vulnerable. The nation's increasingly complicated technological infrastructure will be a tempting target. Imagine, said the commissioners, the effect of a cyber attack on the US air traffic control system on a foggy morning when 200 jetliners are preparing to land at airports misted by rain.

The long-established sanctity of the US homeland might render the psychological effects of true terrorism that much more devastating.

"The most serious threat to our security may consist of unannounced attacks on American cities by subnational groups using genetically engineered pathogens," says the Hart-Rudman group.

Technological vulnerabilities will not be limited to the US, of course. All advanced states will be increasingly affected by the inherent weaknesses of the new global economic infrastructure. Thus, many nations may face the paradox that they are becoming simultaneously more wealthy and more insecure.

"For most advanced states, major threats to national security will broaden beyond the purely military," says the commissioners.

Not all these threats are obvious. Some may not even be intended. The explosion of the Internet and other world-shrinking means of communications, for instance, could be a boon to those seeking to break the hold of despots on their nations. Big ideas will travel quickly around the globe. At the same time, the death of distance means that citizens will be more easily able to form allegiances with people or movements anywhere in the world.

The bonds between citizen and state might be loosened in the US, as well as in traditionally closed societies, such as Iraq.

"The stage will be set for mass action to have social impact beyond the

borders and control of existing political structures," says the report.

Nation States in Crisis

Thus the very idea of the nation-state will likely come under attack in the next millennium, according to Hart–Rudman. International financial organizations, international law enforcement agencies, and international peacekeeping organizations will increasingly usurp national sovereignty.

Impersonal global market forces could crack apart some important states via currency depreciations or debt crises.

"The result will be an increase in the rise of suppressed nationalisms, ethnic or religious violence, humanitarian disasters, major catalytic regional crises, and the spread of dangerous weapons," says the first New World Coming report.

Still, most violence will erupt due to internal conflicts in existing states. The desire for self-determination expressed in Kosovo, Chechnya, and elsewhere will not abate. As more and more people learn about the state of life in the rest of the world they will be less tolerant of their own oppressive or incompetent leaders.

"The number of new states, international protectorates, and zones of autonomy will increase, and many will be born in violence," says the report.

In some ways, next-century conflict will fulfill the predictions of science fiction fantasists. Space will become a critical and competitive military environment, believe Hart–Rudman panel members. Other nations will launch spy and communication satellites. "Weapons will likely be put in space," says the Phase 1 report.

Yet the essence of war will not change. It will cause casualties, carnage, and death. Some adversaries will attempt to maximize casualties in developed societies that have a built-in aversion to losing military personnel.

"It will not be like a video game," says the Hart–Rudman study.

The shadow struggle of intelligence agencies will become more challenging for the US. Electronic miniaturization and new types of sensors will expand collection capabilities for all nations and groups that are technically adept. The US will continue to confront stra-

tegic shocks in which human judgment fails to predict all the dangers in the fast-changing world.

Dealing with regional security crises may become more challenging for the US. Tight budgets and the vulnerability of forward-deployed forces will mean that fewer and fewer US units are positioned overseas, says the commission. Political reluctance and the growing gap between the military capabilities of the US and its allies may make it harder and harder to find partners for combined military operations.

Needed: A Changed Military?

Which leads to the panel's final conclusion: The US military needs to be ready, and it needs to change. Fighting and winning in the first quarter of the 21st century will require forces that are stealthy, fast, accurate, lethal, mobile, and smart.

"It is essential to maintain US technological superiority, despite the unavoidable tension between acquisition of advanced capabilities and the maintenance of current capabilities," concludes the report.

The mix and effectiveness of overall US capability will need to be rethought and adjusted, says the panel. "Discriminating and hard choices will be required," it concludes.

Further Hart–Rudman reports will outline specific recommendations, but panel members have hinted at the ideas to come. When he was in the Senate, Gary Hart often promoted the idea that the US needed to buy cheaper weapons in larger quantities to counter the massive Soviet numerical force advantage. Today, he sounds somewhat different.

"It may be necessary," said the former senator at a Sept. 15 press conference, "to draw down force levels temporarily" to free up money to pay for modernized equipment, which will include systems characterized by "speed, range, unprecedented accuracy, lethality."

Coping with the vulnerability of the US homeland may require some nonmilitary moves, added ex-Speaker Gingrich.

"One of the things this probably implies is a capacity for homeland defense and for civil defense on a scale we have never dreamed of and which will require a significant redistribution of authority," he said.

Commissioners want their work to serve as a spur to the national security establishment in particular and the nation in general. Their basic message is that Americans are going to be less secure than they now believe themselves to be.

The comfortable life of Americans could be destroyed by disruption of computer systems, blacking out of power supplies, poisoning of water reservoirs, and jamming of transportation networks.

"Anybody who lives in Washington, D.C., knows what a single truck can do on the Beltway [a major eight-lane highway that circles the nation's capital] to disrupt the fragility of our communities," said former Rep. Lee Hamilton (D–Ind.), a panel member.

The geopolitical lineup of the world may alter suddenly, as it did the day the Berlin Wall came down. There is no guarantee that today's wealthy and influential nations will remain so.

The question of whether economies in democratic countries, such as Japan, can keep up with, and compete with, emerging giants such as China and India over time is very central, said commissioner Lionel Olmer, a former undersecretary of commerce for international trade.

Most of all, commissioners say, the US needs to realize that thinking does not make it so. Action will be required to shape the coming world. "So there, in a nutshell, is the challenge for American security policy and diplomacy," said commissioner Rice.

As Hart–Rudman sums up: "The future is one of rising stakes. While humanity has an unprecedented opportunity to succor its poor, heal its sick, compose its disagreements, and find new purpose in common global goals, failure at these tasks could produce calamity on a worldwide scale." ■

Peter Grier, the Washington editor of the Christian Science Monitor, is a longtime defense correspondent and regular contributor to Air Force Magazine. His most recent article, "New Roles for the Guard and Reserve," appeared in the November 1999 issue.